



## MISSSES HER BROTHER

Danielle Minor of Little Rock is a fifth-grade student at Newton County Elementary School — and she wants to be an artist when she grows up. Her brother is Spc. Landon Duke of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 185th Aviation Group, Company G, in Meridian. Here's what Danielle said about her picture: "I chose to draw the family on the flag because my brother is in Iraq and I know he misses us."



Minor

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIELLE MINOR

# Seeing him off to Iraq was not what his parents envisioned

Bill and Sharon Paxton wrote this "Braving Rights" story about their son, 29-year-old Sgt. Richard LaCoste of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 185th Aviation Group, Company G, at Key Field in Meridian. Richard has been deployed in Iraq since January 2004 and is due home in March.

By Bill Paxton  
special to The Star

Our son, Richard LaCoste, is serving in Iraq. He is training to be a flight engineer on the Chinook helicopter. He really enjoys flying, and has sent me some wonderful pictures.

He has a wife and a beautiful 2-year-old daughter. He enjoys playing chess and still has a skateboard (he will never grow up). He calls me a lot. We are both into knives and guns. He spends as much time with his daughter, Felicity, as he can when he comes home.

He has been home twice. He had to come home for an emergency. And thanks to the Red Cross for their help in getting him home. He is a warm

and loving son and I am very proud of him.

When he was born, I envisioned many wonderful things for him, but being in a foreign country fighting a war was not one of them. I never dreamed he would be fighting for our country's freedom — or to give another country a chance to have that same freedom.

He tells me not to listen to the news because the news does not report all the good our men and women have done for the people of Iraq. He has been serving in Iraq since January 2004, and is due to come home in March.

I will be glad when all of our soldiers can come home for good. But I do believe the United States did the right thing to help people who can't help themselves. I also believe we need to do whatever it takes to preserve our freedom.

Please remember them daily in your prayers, and also pray for the people of Iraq. And to my son Richard, I love you very much and I am very proud of you for serving our country.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

## "HE WILL NEVER GROW UP"

While he was home on leave, Sgt. Richard LaCoste of the 185th Aviation Group, Company G, and his family took a trip to an amusement park in Pigeon Forge, Tenn. He is shown riding a whirling teacup with his 2-year-old daughter, Felicity.

## Key Field

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In 1992, Company E of the 185th Aviation Group in Meridian became Company G, and the company's CH-54 Sky Cranes were replaced by twin-rotor CH-47 Chinook medium lift helicopters.

Aviation assets under the 185th in Mississippi are: the 1-185th Aviation Battalion at Tupelo and Jackson; Company G, 185th Aviation at Meridian; Company D, 1-159th Aviation at Tupelo; and Company K, 185th Aviation at Camp Shelby near Hattiesburg.

The 150th Combat Engineer Battalion served at Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace and Central Europe during World War II.

In 1954, the 150th Combat Engineer Battalion was organized as the 150th Transportation Battalion. It was reorganized in 1980 as the 150th Quartermaster Battalion and received many Superior Unit Awards for being one of the best units in the Mississippi National Guard.

During Desert Storm, several units of this battalion served in the Persian Gulf. Many of the soldiers and all of the units were decorated for valor and heroism.

Company B of the battalion was recognized for its liberation and defense of Kuwait.

The battalion was reorganized in September 1994 as the 150th Combat Engineer Battalion from new and existing units in East Mississippi.

Elements of the 150th Combat Engineer Battalion are located as follows: Headquarters, Meridian; Company A, Carthage; Company B, Quitman; Detachment 1, Company B, Lucedale; Company C, Houston; Detachment 1, Company C, Okolona.

## SPEAK UP

The Meridian Star asked these students at Quitman High School, "How have you shown your support for the troops in Iraq?"



Baker

"Our school made banners posted in the halls saying 'Support Our Troops.' And, I pray for the people over there and for their families who are still here."

Kourtney Baker, senior



Whitaker

"We had a parade for all the people in Quitman who left to go to Iraq."

Kacie Whitaker, senior



Bridges

"There was a drive for care packages for the troops. We collected baby wipes, toothpaste, deodorant and other basic hygiene needs."

Chris Bridges, junior

## Dear soldiers ...

This letter was submitted by Kamesha Terrell, 13, a seventh-grader at Magnolia Middle School.



Terrell

Thank you for fighting for my freedom. I appreciate your bravery and your caring heart. I've never really thought about the reason until now.

You wake up every morning, maybe thinking about if you going to die today. I wake up, thank God and go have fun. I'm here with my family, thinking that we will never be apart, while you're thinking about your family and wanting to see them.

I just want to say that I really appreciate your time. You truly are my hero. God bless you!

Kamesha Terrell

## Frozen

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Kosovo. She would spend two weeks in Georgia, three days in Washington and three weeks in Germany preparing for her assignment. She will serve in Kosovo at Camp Bondsteel as part of the Task Force Medical Falcon."

Ginger left Meridian Dec. 6 — and may not return home until July 2006.

Camp Bondsteel's mission in Kosovo, another troubled part of the world, is largely humanitarian.

The United States agreed to provide a force of about 7,000 as part of the NATO Kosovo Force. Their job is to help maintain a capable military force and to ensure the safe return of Kosovar refugees. Camp Bondsteel is quite large. The outer perimeter is about 7 miles. It's located on rolling hills and farmland near the city of Ferizaj/Urosevac.

And at home, life will go on without mother.

Damen said the two oldest children understand, but the younger two are having a hard time grasping the weight of the situation.

Anthony is 14, a teenager who loves football and skateboarding. Mychale, 12, plays the trumpet and likes video games. Then there is 9-year-old Jon Tyler, an affectionate "people person," and 8-year-old aggressive athletic Andrew Paul.

"They are a handful with help — but alone, it is a totally new experience," he said.

"Dealing with kids is a new one on me, but I love them. Everyone's life has changed. Now there is cleaning the house, cooking, washing clothes, working and going to college."

There is a song that has lyrics something like, "I love you, I want you and I need you to survive." Don't we all feel that way about the ones we love? When loved ones are gone, we are frozen.

Damen's message is this: "We should not look at our soldiers being gone as a blessing or a curse. They are gone, serving each one of us, and we will pray to God for their return."

Until they do, we will be frozen.

Dealing with kids is a new one on me, but I love them. Everyone's life has changed.

Damen Regan